

How to Talk to Your Health Care Provider about STDs

Many people think they aren't at risk of an STD, but sexually transmitted diseases are the most common type of infection. You might think it couldn't happen to you; however, you are at greater risk if:

- You ever had unprotected (no condom use) sex;
- You and your sex partner ever had more than one sex partner;
- You don't know your sex partner's sexual history;
- You have symptoms such as bumps, rashes, sores, or burning near your genitals.

You might find it difficult talking to others, including your health care provider, about sexual topics. It can be embarrassing and uncomfortable. If you think you could have an STD, the longer you wait, the harder it can be to treat. Your health care provider is your first step towards protecting your sexual health. Remember that your health care provider is there *for you*.

How to Begin

You might expect your health care provider to begin the conversation about your sexual health. This isn't always true. Also, you will probably be more comfortable discussing this before the exam, while you are clothed. Here are some suggestions to begin the talk:

"I have a new boyfriend/girlfriend and we don't always use condoms. Am I at risk of a sexually transmitted disease?"

"My girlfriend found out she has Chlamydia. I'd like to be tested for Chlamydia and other STDs."

"I have been dating several people and I've had sex with them. I want to be tested for STDs."

"I have a new girlfriend and before we consider a sexual relationship, I want to be tested for STDs."

What to Tell Your Health Care Provider

Your health care provider needs to know specific information about you to best assess your risk of STDs. You should be prepared to openly discuss:

- Your sexual history;
- Your current sexual practices;
- Your condom use;
- If you are female, whether you could be pregnant;
- Any symptoms you might have.

What to Ask Your Health Care Provider

It's always a good idea to plan for your appointment. What questions do you want answered by your provider? Take the time to think ahead and then write them down. Sometimes during an appointment, you might forget to ask a question. If you have it written down, you don't have to worry about remembering it. It is also a good idea to write down your health care provider's answers to your questions, as well. What are some questions to ask? You should ask:

- Could I have an STD and not know it?
- How often should I be tested for STDs?
- Should I be tested for any STD today?
- (If female) How often should I get a Pap smear?
- How can I protect myself and my partner from STDs?

Other Informational Links:

American Social Health Association

<http://www.ashastd.org/>

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

<http://www.cdc.gov/STD/>

E-Cards, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

<http://www2c.cdc.gov/ecards/index.asp?category=174>

Get Yourself Tested

<http://www.gytnow.org/>

National Institute of Health Medline

<http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/sexuallytransmitteddiseases.html>

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

<http://www.womenshealth.gov/fag/sexually-transmitted-infections.cfm>

World Health Organization

http://www.who.int/topics/sexually_transmitted_infections/en/